

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 CAIRO 12819 221948Z

42

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07

INR-07 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /082 W

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R 221535Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7254

INFO AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 12819

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, EG

SUBJ: CAIRO BUS DRIVER'S STRIKE

REF CAIRO 12687,

1. SUMMARY: SEPT 18/19 CAIRO BUS DRIVERS' PARTIAL STRIKE HAS CONTINUED TO RECEIVE MAJOR PRESS TREATMENT, OBVIOUSLY ORCHESTRATED BY GOE, WHICH HAS DOWNPLAYED STRIKE AS INDICATOR OF WORKER MALAISE, CONDEMNED "COMMUNIST EXPLOITERS" AND STRESSED NEED TO PULL TOGETHER IN SOLVING EGYPT'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. LABOR AND GOVT BOTH MADE THE BEST OF THE SITUATION, SALVAGING IMAGE OF COOPERATIVE RELATIONS, AND SUBJECT WILL PROBABLY BE DROPPED. QUESTION OF RIGHT TO STRIKE, NOW RAIDED PUBLICLY, MAY LEAD UNIONISTS DISCREETLY TO SEEK CHANGE IN LAW. REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHAT TACK FEDERATION WILL NOW TAKE AND EXTENT TO WHICH IT WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE POLICY FOR ITS MEMBER UNIONS. EMD SUMMARY

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CAIRO 12819 221948Z

2. PRIMIN SALIM DESCRIBED STRIKE TO AHAM AS "MOST OBJECT-IONABLE", RELEGATING IT TO HEINOUS CATEGORY OF "DEVIATION" FROM NATIONAL PHILOSOPHY. STATE'S SOLICITUDE FOR MASSES AND COMPLIANCE WITH CERTAIN WORKER DEMANDS SHOULD NOT BE EXPLOITED TO PRESS "ILLOGICAL CLAIMS". GOE READY, AS ALWAYS FOR DIALOGUE, "BUT WILL NOT TOLERATE VIOLENCE, STRIKES AND SABOTAGE." MARXIST INSTIGATORS" WERE TO BLAME AND WILL BE PUNISHED, (STICK) BUT GOE WILL UNDERTAKE "URGENT MEASURES" TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS OF ITS WORKERS "ON BASIS OF ACTUAL PRODUCTIVITY" (CARROT). "LAW OF REWARD AND PUNISHMENT" WILL BE APPLIED TO EARNINGS.

3. PRESS REPORTS CONFIRMED SOME OF WHAT WE HAD HEARD PRIVATELY (REFTEL) BUT ARE STILL AT VARIANCE WITH FACTS PROVIDED US BY UNION LEADERS, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO TRACING WORKER COMPLAINTS TO PRODUCTIVELY INCENTIVE PAYMENTS RATHER THAN INVIOABLE RAMADAN BONUS. PAPERS CONFIRMED, HOWEVER, THAT BUS COMPANY ADMINISTRATION HAD FAILED FOR 25 DAYS TO RESPOND TO UNION INITIATIVE FOR DIALOGUE ON MATTER AND THAT GOE HAD AGREED TO NON-INTERFERENCE BY POLICE. PRESS ALSO STRESSED THAT THERE NO RPT NOT CONNECTION, AS SOME HAVE SPECULATED, BETWEEN TIMING OF STRIKE AND RECENT PRESIDENTIAL REFERENDUM. APPROACH OF END OF RAMADAN HOLIDAYS, AS UNION OFFICIALS PREVIOUSLY TOLD US, WAS PRECIPITATING FACTOR.

4. EDITORIALS CHORUSED SUPPORT FOR GOE APPROACH TO LABOR. AHAM PIECE, WITH GIVEAWAY TITLE "LABOR LOGIC AND THE ONE FAMILY CONCEPT" PREDICTED SMOOTH SAILING FOR EGYPT PROVIDED ALL MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY PULLED THEIR WEIGHT IN BOOSTING PRODUCTION AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO PROGRESS. IN RETROSPECT, SADAT'S ADDRESS TO NATION SEPT 19 (CAIRO 12655) INDICATES HE HAD STRIKE AND WORKER MALAISE VERY MUCH IN MIND AND HIS REMARKS SET TONE FOR PUBLIC TREATMENT THAT FOLLOWED. ASSURANCES OF IMPORTANCE CENTRALITY OF PUBLIC SECTOR, MAJOR WORKER CONCERN, WERE CLEARLY ADDRESSED TO LABOR, AS WAS POINTED COMMENT THAT WORKERS "ENJOY ALL RIGHTS" BUT HAVE DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS WHICH "MAKE WORK SACRED AND NEGLIGENCE A CRIME".

5. ON SEPT 22, SADAT MET WITH LANDTRANSPORT WORKER UNION
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CAIRO 12819 221948Z

PRES OKEILY IN HIGHLY PUBLICIZED MEETING. REPORTS OF THIS RITUALIZED RECONCILIATION, IN BEST EGYPTIAN TRADITION, FEATURED OKEILY'S APOLOGIES ON BEHLAF OF THE TRANSPORT WORKERS, "WHO FULLY SUPPORT AND RALLY BEHIND THE PRESIDENT". PRES EXPRESSED PATERNAL CONFIDENCE THAT "HIS SONS" THE TRANSPORT WORKERS, WOULD NEVER REPEAT SUCH AN ACTION.

6. SEPARATE INTERION MINISTRY STATEMENT ABSOLVED UNION PER

SE OF BLAME FOR EVENTS INSTIGATED BY "CERTAIN ELEMENTS" AND REPORTS CONFIRM ASSURANCES UNION HAD RECEIVED THAT IT WOULD NOT BE SUBJECT TO CRACKDOWN. STATEMENT ALSO NOTED THAT EGYPTIAN FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS HAD FORMALLY EXPRESSED ITS REGRET OVER BUS DRIVERS EPISODE. (WE HAVE SINCE LEARNED THAT FEDERATION HAD NO ACTIVE ROLE IN DISPUTE UNTIL INVITED BY OKEILY TO BE FULL PARTICIPANT IN TALKS WITH GOE DURING STRIKE.) WE SUPPOSE THAT NOW, WITH RAMADAN BONUSES BEING EXPEDITED AND ALL CONCERNED CLAIMING THAT NORMAL SITUATION REIGNS, GOE WILL ENCOURAGE END TO PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THIS EMBARRASSING EPISODE. THE STRIKE, OF COURSE, COULD NOT HAVE BEEN HUSHED UP BECAUSE OF ITS DIRECT PUBLIC IMPACT, BUT GOE-- AND UNION-- SEEMTO HAVE MADE THE BEST OF THE SITUATION. OKEILY ET AL HAVE REINFORCED, WE THINK JUSTLY, THEIR CREDENTIALS AS CHAMPIONS OF LABOR, WHILE GOE HAD A SMILING OKEILY AS AUDIENCE TO ITS PUBLIC FLAGELLATION OF THE COMMUNISTS. THE NASSERIST MYTH OF ANATIONAL TEAM OR "FAMILY" WAS SOMEWHAT BATTERED BUT, AT LEAST FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES, IT IS STILL INTACT. THAT IT REMAINS A SACROSANCT PHILOSOPHICAL PILLAR WAS AMPLY DEMONSTRATED BY THE OKEILY-SADAT MEETING.

7. MEANWHILE, THE CENTRAL QUESTION OF THE RIGHT TO STRIKE, USUALLY FUZZED OVER, HAS NOT BEEN PUBLICLY RAISED BY PRIMIN SALIM AND SEEMS TO BE PROMINENT IN THE THOUGHTS OF AT LEAST SOME LAOBR LEADERS. OKEILY, FOR EXAMPLE, HAD QUIETLY ENCOURAGED THE STRIKE -- ILLEGALLY, BUT NOT WITHOUT SOME JUSTIFICATION FROM THE SYSTEM ITSELF -- BUT SPOKE RUEFULLY TO THE LRO OF MOST STRIKES AS A "LUXURY" IN TODAY'S EGYPT. ANOTHER UNION PRESIDENT UNWOUND OVER DINNER SEPT 22 TO COMMENT THAT THE LAW, SEVERELY CIRCUMSCRIBING THE RIGHT TO STRIKE, MUST CHANGE. THE LAW, AND PRESENT ECONOMICS WERE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS IN HIS VIEW AND THE GOVT MUST NOT HIDE BEHIND THE ECONOMIC SITUATION TO DENY LABOR THE STRIKE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 CAIRO 12819 221948Z

OPTION AT LEAST IN PRINCIPLE. HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES AGREED THAT THE BATTLE TO CHANGE THE LAW WOULD BE LONG AND DIFFICULT, BUT THEY CLAIM THEY INTEND TO TRY, ALBEIT WITH THE DISCRETION CURCUMSTANCES DEMAND.

8. FINALLY, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF THE FEDERATION WILL DECIDE TO ASSUME A LOW PROFILE FOR THE NEAR FUTURE. IF SO, THERE FOLLOWS THE QUESTION OF ITS ABILITY TO DICTATE TO ITS HIGHLY INDEPENDENT MEMBER UNIONS, SOME OF WICH MAY NOW VIEW THE GOE AS ON THE RUN.

MATTHES

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